**The Mistake of Athens**

During the height of the Peloponnesian war, which was an all-out war in Greece between Athens and Sparta, an envoy of leaders and ambassadors from the little town of Egesta in Sicily came to Athens for help. Their enemy, neighboring Selinus, was attacking them again, and they needed allies to help defeat the city of Selinus. As it always happened in Athens, the city held an assembly, where any Athenian male citizen could come to speak his mind.

The assembly needed to decide on if they wanted to go to war in Sicily with Egesta, or not. A general named Alcibiades, a man who wanted much glory and much power, desired to start that war, so that he could earn glory and power in battle. He convinced the people that spreading democracy to Egesta was important and necessary, and so the people of Athens voted to go to war, and to have Alcibiades in charge of the fight.

The naval expedition was the largest that had ever been in Greek history to that time. Athens spent much of its money building ships and training soldiers. At the end, they had over 25,000 soldiers and sailors, and 113 ships that went to fight in Sicily. With the navy ships were merchants and scavengers, who came along in hopes of taking loot and winning money and trade deals.

The fight in Sicily ended up being a total disaster. The Athenian people did not realize that they could not handle fighting on two fronts. There were too many enemies in Sicily, and the navy they sent could not handle being on its own so far from its home base. the Athenian people made a terrible tactical error, and paid the price: nearly all the ships and all the men were lost. Very few returned. And without money, soldiers, or a navy, Athens eventually lost the war to Sparta, and was forever weak for the rest of time.

**The Mistake of Sparta**

During the height of Spartan strength after the Peloponnesian war, Sparta began to involve itself in other wars. With Athens beaten, there was no equal to Sparta, and so Sparta felt invincible. It treated small cities poorly, it bullied other towns and cities to pick leaders that favored Sparta, and it fought all over Greece.

Eventually, they fought so many different towns and cities, that an alliance of Athens, Thebes, and many others in Greece rose to fight off Sparta and its constant wars. Sparta, thinking it was the very best in Greek warfare, immediately attacked the alliance. They hoped to beat the cities quickly and remain in power.

However, the city of Thebes grew very powerful, and they built up an elite force of Greek soldiers called the Sacred Band. The Sacred Band had only 150 soldiers, but it soon showed how outstanding they were: in a battle at the plain of Leuctra, Thebes beat a Spartan army bigger than them, killing nearly half the Spartans.

Thebes, Athens, and others then invaded Sparta—something that hadn’t happened in a long time. Sparta lost all its slaves, its allies, its local cities. Sparta was eventually spared total destruction, but it never regained its strength. Sparta never again held power over Greece, and never again rose back to the strength it once had.